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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 008448

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY'S NEW GOVERNMENT: MORE INSIGHTS INTO CABINET FORMATION AND SPEAKERSHIP OF PARLIAMENT

REF: ANKARA 8382

(U) Classified by polcounselor John Kunstadter; reasons: 1.5
(b,d).

¶11. (U) Summary: President Sezer drew a line by rejecting one proposed cabinet assignment in the AK government, but allowed AK to keep the candidate as a State Minister. Fiery orator Bulent Arinc, who has his own strong following among AK voters and whom we expect to underscore the prerogatives of Parliament, has been elected Speaker. End summary.

¶12. (U) We understand that, in considering AK Party's draft cabinet list (ref), President Sezer objected to inclusion of Besir Atalay as Education Minister. He did so owing to Atalay's having been fired from his rectorship of Kirikkale University in the wake of the 1997 "February 28" process ("post-modern" coup) through which the Turkish military organized the downfall of the Islamist Refah-Yol government of Necmettin Erbakan. The High Education Council (YOK) ruled that Atalay had hired fundamentalist teachers and given scholarships to Islamist students; then President Demirel approved the YOK decision. AK, i.e., P.M.-designate Abdullah Gul, insisted on keeping Atalay as a State Minister, gave former leading ANAP figure and AK newcomer Erkan Mumcu (ref A) the education portfolio, withdrew the name of Vahit Erdem as candidate DefMin, and gave the defense portfolio to Vecdi Gonul (ref).

¶13. (C) As expected, Nov. 19 AK vice chairman Bulent Arinc was elected Speaker of Parliament on the first ballot over CHP candidate Onder Sav by 369 to 173 votes. Arinc, who has a strong following among more militant AK supporters, forced his way into the position over the plan of party chairman Erdogan to promote Vecdi Gonul, trusted by President Sezer, for the position which is second in Turkish state protocolary order (the Speaker is acting President in President's absence).

¶14. (C) Arinc, one of the best orators in Parliament, has thus carved out an independent spot for himself, since the Speaker is separate from the cabinet and not answerable to the President (when the rumors started spreading that Sezer was angling to have AK nominate Gonul as Speaker, Arinc emphasized to us that Sezer had no right to meddle in the selection process). We will watch the Erdogan-Gul-Arinic dynamics and the Arinc-Sezer dynamics closely. At a minimum we can expect Arinc to be more willing to assert the prerogatives of the elected Parliament and defend them in the face of a limited-power presidency and other elements of the Kemalist Deep State. Arinc bio in para 5.

¶15. (C) Bulent Arinc:

--Born in Bursa 1948. Graduated from Ankara U. Law Faculty 1970. Worked as a lawyer in the Aegean region city of Manisa. From his university days was active in Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist National Salvation Party (MSP) youth branch directorate, and served as Manisa province chairman.

--1995 elected on Erbakan's Refah Party ticket from Manisa and served in the Refah Party directorate. He served on the parliamentary Judiciary Committee and Turkey-EU Joint Commission. Elected in 1999 from Manisa on the Refah-successor Fazilet ticket, Arinc served as a Fazilet parliamentary group deputy chairman and served on the Foreign Affairs Committee. Joining the newly-formed AK upon the closure of Fazilet, he was elected AK's parliamentary group chairman.

--Married, two children. Reads Arabic; studied some English. Devoutly religious Muslim who brings a neo-Ottoman sensibility to politics and to foreign policy considerations.

--Arinc has built up a strong following among Islam-oriented voters partly through years of crisscrossing Turkey as a lecturer and symposium participant; through his rhetorical skills as an incisive debater on TV talk shows; and through his willingness more than others in the Islam-oriented movement to call the Turkish military (and Sezer) to task for meddling in political affairs. He has visited Western Europe frequently, and has been to the U.S.

--Arinc is a long-time, close contact of the Embassy. Since the death of his son in an auto accident in the late 1990's and particularly since the formation of AK in mid-2001, we have found him to be more attuned to issues of protocol, given the attention paid to Erdogan and Gul and his own sensitivity at being considered AK's number three man. At the same time he has always been an open interlocutor, particularly in more casual settings, where matters of protocol do not figure prominently. He enjoys contact with the Embassy. He is a tough politician, committed to his Islam-oriented principles, fiery as an orator but measured in private conversation.

PEARSON